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Opinion - Letters to the Editor
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Viewpoint: Foster youths need our support

By Jim Roberts
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There was a time in the history of the Family Care Network when youth exiting the foster care system were treated like trash — essentially thrown away.

I vividly remember one instance involving a teenage girl in our care from Santa Clara County who aged out of the foster care system. My staff was instructed by her county worker to pull her from the family with whom she lived through her high school years and return her to San Jose. When she arrived at the Social Services office, she was loaded on a bus and driven to the homeless shelter.

At the time, this was common practice throughout California. Fortunately for this girl, her foster mom was appalled by this type of abuse and took her back into her home until she could move in with her older brother. However, most foster youth were not so fortunate. These abused and neglected youth were routinely sent packing with no resources, skills, connections, permanency or safety net for support.



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Not surprising, for decades the outcomes for former foster youth were deplorable and unconscionable. Several years ago, the Anne E. Casey Foundation released a summary from multiple studies on former foster youth. What would you think if this was your child or relative?

Fifty-six percent of young adults accessing federally-funded homeless shelters were former foster youth; 46 percent failed to complete high school; 51 percent were unemployed four years after leaving foster care; the median annual income of former foster youth two years after leaving the

system was \$4,478; 47 percent of youth exiting foster care were receiving mental health services while in care with only 21 percent able to continue receiving these services after care; 44 percent of former foster youth report difficulty in receiving health care; 42 percent became parents within four years of leaving foster care; 41 percent reported being arrested as an adult; more than 30 percent reported selling drugs or prostituting to earn money; and less than 2 percent completed college.

Several years ago, it was reported that more than 65 percent of the California prison population had spent some time in foster care. I could go on, but I think you get the point.

About 15 years ago, bureaucrats began to wake up to the fact that the system was further abusing these vulnerable youth. Realistically, how many of us with well-adjusted children can honestly say that at 18 years old they were ready to live independently, without support, with any degree of success? Last year, it was reported that the average age for a young adult to finally "disconnect" from family support was 28 years old.

Not only did the system further traumatize victims of abuse and neglect, but at a huge taxpayer expense. It costs taxpayers \$47,000 per year per inmate in the California prison system, in addition to the cost for the array of other public services required.

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